

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A ~~An isolated~~ catalyst-coated membrane with protective film layer comprising:
 - (a) a catalyst-coated ionomer membrane consisting essentially of an anode catalyst layer, an ionomer membrane, and a cathode catalyst layer, wherein said ionomer membrane comprises two surfaces and each of said two surfaces comprising:
 - (i) an active area, wherein said active area is coated with said anode or cathode catalyst layer, and
 - (ii) a passive area; and
 - (b) at least one layer of protective film attached to each of the two surfaces of said catalyst-coated ionomer membrane, wherein said at least one layer of protective film overlaps the passive area and the active area of each surface and wherein the protective film is in contact with said anode or cathode catalyst layer so that a layer sequence of membrane-catalyst layer-protective film is formed in a region of each active area.
2. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein said passive area forms a perimeter around said active area.
3. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein the region of

the active area that is overlapped by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 0.5 to 20% of the total active area of the membrane, and the region of the passive area that is overlapped by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 80 to 150% of the total passive area.

4. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein the at least one layer of protective film comprises an organic polymer material with a thickness in the range of 10 to 150 microns.

5. (previously presented) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 4, wherein the organic polymer material comprises a polymer selected from the group consisting of polytetrafluoroethylene, PVDF, polyethylene, polypropylene, polyester, polyamide, co-polyamide, polyamide elastomers, polyimide, polyurethane, polyurethane elastomers, silicones, silicone rubbers, and silicon based elastomers.

6. (original) The catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1, wherein the ionomer membrane comprises a substance selected from the group consisting of perfluorinated sulfonic acid polymers, acid-doped polybenzimidazoles, acid-group-modified polyetherketones, ionically conductive organic/inorganic materials and composite reinforced materials.

7. (withdrawn) A process for manufacturing a catalyst-coated membrane, said process comprising applying at least one layer of protective film to two surfaces of an ionomer membrane under pressure and heat for a period of 0.1 to 15 minutes, wherein said two surfaces each comprise a passive area and an active area, wherein said active area is coated with a catalyst layer.

8. (withdrawn) A process for manufacturing a catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 7, wherein the pressure is in the range of 10 to 100 bar and the heat

establishes a temperature in the range of 20 to 200°C.

9. (previously presented) A membrane-electrode-assembly comprised of:

(a) the catalyst-coated membrane according to claim 1; and

(b) at least one gas diffusion layer, wherein said at least one gas diffusion layer covers at least a portion of the active area of said catalyst-coated membrane and contacts, overlaps and/or penetrates the at least one layer of protective film of the catalyst-coated membrane.

10. (original) The membrane-electrode-assembly according to claim 9, wherein the region of the active area contacted by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 0.5 to 20% of the total active area of the membrane, the region of the passive area contacted by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 80 to 150% of the total passive area of the membrane and the region of the gas diffusion layer contacted by the at least one layer of protective film is in the range of 0.5 to 50% of the total area of the gas diffusion layer.

11. (withdrawn) A process for manufacturing a membrane-electrode-assembly, said process comprising applying a gas diffusion and at least one protective film to two surfaces of an ionomer membrane under pressure and heat for a period of 0.1 to 15 minutes, wherein said two surfaces each comprise a passive area and an active area, wherein said active area is coated with a catalyst layer.

12. (withdrawn) A process for manufacturing a membrane-electrode-assembly according to claim 11, wherein the pressure is in the range of 10 to 100 bar and the heat establishes a temperature in the range of 20 to 200°C.

13. (original) A method of using the catalyst-coated membrane of claim 1, comprising

operating a PEM or DMFC fuel cell stack that comprises the catalyst-coated membrane of claim 1.

14. (original) A method of using the membrane-electrode-assembly of claim 9, comprising operating a PEM or DMFC fuel cell stack that comprises the membrane electrode-assembly of claim 9.

15. (new) A catalyst-coated membrane with protective film layer of claim 1, wherein said membrane does not contain a carbon-based substrate.